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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Appropriations Committee: February 15, 2012

H.B. 5014 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2013

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Eric Hammerling and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association, the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. As you may know, CFPA has offered testimony before the Legislature on issues such as sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation every year since 1897.

I testify today in support of the budget of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) with a particular focus on those outdoor recreation programs critical to sustain the state's forests, parks, trails, fisheries, and wildlife.

In December, 2011, DEEP released a Study conducted by UConn's Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis (CCEA) entitled "The Economic Impact of State Parks, Forests and Natural Resources" [available at <http://www.ctwoodlands.org/UConnEconStudy>] with three significant findings:

- **Outdoor activities on state lands have an annual economic benefit of more than \$1 billion a year and 9,000 jobs;**
- **For every \$1 the state spends on the state park system annually, it receives an average return of \$38 in economic activity; and**
- **Failure to invest in maintenance and management of these natural assets would lead to losses in both state revenues and jobs.**

Following are some details from the CCEA Study:

- Of the \$1 billion spent on recreation, visitors to parks and forests spent \$544 million in 2010 on general tourism activities in Connecticut such as lodging, meals, groceries, and other activities and goods during their stay.

- Fishing accounted for \$264 million in expenditures. Hunting accounted for \$100 million in expenditures. Recreational boating accounted for nearly \$37 million in expenditures. Another \$26.2 million came from skiing and attending educational and other venues.
- The 9,000 private sector jobs credited to the state parks system and associated recreational activities result in \$343 million in personal income, estimated to grow to \$595 million in current dollars in 2020. Of that \$343 million, \$253 million is considered disposable income, increasing to \$471 million by 2020.
- DEEP's 250,000 acres of open space increases property values for those whose land borders or overlooks the state green spaces. In addition to the benefit to property owners, the increased property values generated an estimated \$3.1 to \$5.4 million to municipalities.

At the same time, we believe the benefits documented in the Study represent a "floor" rather than a "ceiling" because several activities with considerable economic costs associated with them were not included. Notably, hiking/walking/running, biking, horseback riding, wildlife watching, and many related travel expenditures were not incorporated into the Study's analysis.

CFPA's Recommendation

In 2013, the State Park system will be celebrating its 100 year anniversary. As you consider the budget that will be in place for the Parks Centennial, please keep in mind that currently there are only 16 park supervisors and 58 maintainers employed by DEEP to keep 107 parks open for the public. Perhaps 5 or 6 of these staff may retire in 2012, and these positions will need to be refilled.

Although we understand that additional revenues may not be forthcoming for DEEP and some attrition may be inevitable, we respectfully request that the Committee support funding levels that will allow DEEP to at least retain current staff levels by re-filling positions and by making durational positions permanent.

For the full set of recommendations for DEEP and other state programs put forward in CFPA's Conservation Agenda for 2012, please visit <http://www.ctwoodlands.org/advocacy>

I am available to answer any potential questions you may have via ehammerling@ctwoodlands.org or 860/346-TREE.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter!